

Message Text

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FM AMEMBASSY TEGUCIGALPA

TO SECSTATE WASHDC 1465

INFO AMEMBASSY GUATEMALA

AMEMBASSY MANAGUA

AMEMBASSY SAN JOSE

AMEMBASSY SAN SALVADOR

USCINCSO

C O N F I D E N T I A L TEGUCIGALPA 4518

E.O. 11652: GDS

TAGS: ELAB, HO

SUBJECT: DISSIDENTS WIN SITRATERCO ELECTION

REF: TEGUCIGALPA 4153 AND PREVIOUS

BEGIN SUMMARY: SITRATERCO (UNITED BRANDS UNION) HELD AN EXTRAORDINARY CONGRESS ON OCTOBER 15. THE UNION "OLD GUARD" WAS TOTALLY DEFEATED AND A COMPLETELY NEW EXECUTIVE COMMITTEE WAS ELECTED. ONE OF THE FUNDAMENTAL REASONS FOR THE DEFEAT OF THE "OLD GUARD" WAS ITS INABILITY TO DEAL EFFECTIVELY WITH THE GRIEVANCES AND DISCONTENT OF UNION MEMBERS. THE NEW ELECTION IS A CLEAR INDICATION THAT THE COMMUNISTS ARE GAINING AN UPPER HAND IN SITRATERCO, BY FAR THE MOST POWERFUL UNION IN THE COUNTRY. END SUMMARY.

1. THE EXTRAORDINARY CONGRESS HELD ON OCTOBER 15 REJECTED THE "OLD GUARD" SITRATERCO LEADERSHIP THAT HAD BEEN ELECTED IN THE HOTLY CONTESTED AUGUST 26 CONGRESS. THE NEW EXECUTIVE COMMITTEE CONSISTS OF THE FOLLOWING:

(A) PRESIDENT - LUIS THIEBAUD CRUZ;

(B) SECRETARY GENERAL - RUFINO AYALA;

(C) SECRETARY OF ORGANIZATION - RIGOBERTO LUNA VILLEDA;

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(D) SECRETARY OF LABOR - OSCAR MARIO ESCOBAR;

(E) TREASURER - MIGUEL BERTRAND; AND
(F) RECORDING SECRETARY -JORGE MORALES.

2. THE EXTRAORDINARY CONGRESS WAS ATTENDED BY 108 DLELEGATES, AND MET IN SITRATERCO HEADQUARTERS IN LA LIMA. IT WAS CHARACTERIZED BY HEATED EXCHANGES AMONG THE DELEGATES AND BY CHARGES AGAINST THE "OLD GUARD" LEADERSHIP. OBDULIO CACERES, THE RECENTLY-ELECTEYSEXECUTIVE COMMITTEE PRESIDENT, DEFENDED HIS POSITION BUT WAS COMPELLED TO RESIGN AFTER HE RECOGNIZED THE FUTILITY OF ATTEMPTING TO RETAIN POWER. THE OTHER MEMBERS OF THE EXECUTIVE COMMITTEE ELECTED ON AUGUST 26 ALSO RESIGNED, THUS SETTING THE STAGE FOR THE ELECTION OF THE NEW COMMITTEE.

3. LUIS THIEBAUD STATED THAT HE WAS NOT A COMMUNIST AND CRITICIZED CACERES AND OTHERS FOR TRYING TO MAINTAIN THEIR POSITIONS BY CALLING HIM A COMMUNIST. HE SAID THAT HE WOULD BE "TOUGH WITH THE TELA RAILWAY COMPANY". OSCAR GALE VARELA, THE UNION'S FOUNDER, SAID THAT THIEBAUD IS "A VERY INDECISIVE MAN" WHO HAS BEEN "SURROUNDED BY THE COMMUNISTS".

4. COMMENT: AS POINTED OUT IN PREVIOUS EMBASSY REPORTS THE SITUATION IN SITRATERCO HAD BECOME VERY DIFFICULT FOR THE TRADITIONAL LEADERSHIP, AND THE COMMUNISTS WERE MAKING DEEP INROADS INTO THE UNION MEMBERSHIP. ONE OF THE FUNDAMENTAL PROBLEMS HAD BEEN THE LACK OF LEADERSHIP EXHIBITED BY THE "OLD GUARD" IN THE FACE OF EMERGING CHALLENGES. IT SHOULD BE MADE CLEAR THAT THE OPPOSITION TO CACERES, GALE, ETC., WAS NOT JUST COMMUNIST, PARTICULARLY SINCE THERE ARE RELATIVELY FEW COMMUNISTS IN THE UNION. HOWEVER, THE TRADITIONAL LEADERSHIP FAILED TO DEAL EFFECTIVELY WITH THE DISSENT WITHIN UNION RANKS AND THE COMMUNISTS WERE ABLE TO CAPITALIZE ON THE DISCONTENT AND GRIEVANCES OF UNION MEMBERS. THE NEW ELECTION IS A CLEAR INDICATION THAT THE COMMUNISTS ARE GAINING THE UPPER HAND IN SITRATERCO, BY FAR THE MOST INFLUENTIAL AND POWERFUL UNION IN THE COUNTRY. BY THE NATURE OF ITS POSITION IT IS THE MOST IMPORTANT SUPPORT OF THE FREE LABOR MOVEMENT IN HONDURAS.
SANCHEZ

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